



Sermon – January 2, 2022

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Verses Covered This Week

Matthew 25:14 – 30

Ephesians 2:8 - 10

Good morning, good morning. Welcome to Central. It is nice and chilly outside. I'm sure you were excited. I literally went to bed last night, I turned the air conditioning off at 8:00 because it had been running all day, and of course, woke up this morning to 26 degrees and 26 mile an hour winds. So welcome winter, happy 2022. I saw meme that said, we're all, no one's claiming 2021 as their year, we're all just walking in quietly, don't say a word and don't touch anything and hopefully everything will be OK.

We just came off of the Christmas holiday and now we are into the resolution holiday. How many of you are new year resolution people? Raise your hands. A few of you. Some of you don't want to admit it because it's January 2nd and you've already failed, right? That's the reality for most of us. And if your resolution this year was to be more consistent in worship attendance and you are here, way to go, right? Because today was one of those mornings, if you're watching online and that was you, come back next week, ok, it is 26 degrees, we understand.

But as we start a new year, it's always a time to reflect. And if Isaiah 43:18, being all over social media is any indication, a lot of people had a rough 2021. I'll let you go look that up but it basically says, forget the former things, right? It's basically saying, I'm done with 2021. I'm ready for God to do something new. So I want us to start out this morning, I want you to do a little exercise for me. We're going to come back to it at the end of the message. So you might want to make a little note on your notes, put it in your phone notes, just remember it in your head, but I want you right now, take a few seconds, and I want you on a scale of 1 to 10, I want you to rate your year 2021. 10 being absolute best year of my life, 1 like I never want to experience anything from the last 12 months ever again. 1 to 10. How would you rate 2021? Just take a second for that. I'll let you write something down, put it in your head, we'll come back to it in just a second. A lot of times as we come to the beginning of a new year, some people have a word of the year. I notice someone, they had their list in 2012, 13, 14, I noticed several different words in there: hope, peace, joy, love, different things. And they'd pick a word

that they want to focus on for a year. Other people do resolutions, right. We know the common ones: lose weight, exercise, eat healthy, get more sleep, stop eating Shipley's Donuts, I mean these are the primary top 5 for most of us in College Station, right? But there's also an opportunity for us to evaluate spiritually, are there things that God would have us to do? And the beginning of the year's a great time to take some new steps. One of the most common things is, hey, I want to read through the Bible this year or I want to reconnect into the word of God, those type things. Those are all great. But I want us to ask ourselves as we move into 2022, what is the ultimate goal of our life for this year?

Friday morning I got a call from Tim Skaggs. We'd been in communication all week talking about what we always do the last week of December. And that is, deer hunting. It's the last week of deer season so we're communicating, you gonna hunt, you gonna get to hunt? All these things. And we're rolling along and I knew that Tim had been potentially exposed to COVID but he had not gotten a test back. Well, Friday morning he calls me and he said, "Well, I got the test back. It's positive." And I was like, "Bummer for you. Sorry." You know. He's doing well, symptoms are mild, in fact, he's pretty frustrated that he couldn't be here because of that. He goes, "Well, you know what that means. You're up." And I was like, "Tim, it's Friday morning." He like, "Yep. You're up. Phillips out. You're up." So immediately thought through it, prayed about it, decided yes, ok, I'm available, I will preach. And as I did that, I immediately started thinking, "God, what is it that You would have me to share?" And several months ago, I can't tell you the day, I can't tell you the reason, but at some point God had laid on my heart these six words: well done good and faithful servant. And I wrote those down in my notes app on my phone. They were just there. And honestly, several times I'd looked at it, thought about it, really hadn't put much thought into it. But as Tim contact me and I began to think about what to preach, I went back to those notes and the Lord just laid on my heart, "This is the passage that I want you to bring this Sunday morning." It comes from Matthew 25. It's the parable of the talents. Now you may not know this parable, maybe it's familiar to you, I want us to start and read from the parable of the talents, one of the first few verses, and then we will open in prayer. So Matthew 25, verse 14. It says this:

¹⁴“For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants on, called his servants and entrusted to them his property. ¹⁵To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. ¹⁶He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. ¹⁷So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. ¹⁸But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. ¹⁹Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them.

Let's pray.

Father God, we thank You for a new year. We thank You for a fresh start. We thank You that Your mercies are new every morning. Lord, this morning we ask that You would shower us with Your mercies, Lord, that You would call us to pursue You. Lord, I ask that You would speak to us clearly from Your word, that this parable will apply to our lives wherever we're at and that each one of us would seek to receive the message that You have for us. Lord, speak clearly to us today. It's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Alright, so the parable of the talents. It's the second parable in Matthew 25. If you'll look back to verse 1, we get a little bit clearer picture of what he's talking about. In verse 1 it says: then the kingdom of heaven will be like, and he proceeds to share a parable about ten virgins, virgins. But in verse 14 he continues, for it will be like, well, what is it? He's talking about the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God. So let's lay some foundational work here. What is a parable? A parable is simply an earthly story with heavenly meaning. This is a story that the disciples, who Jesus was speaking to, would have understood the context of this illustration He's laying out for them and then He's going to give them a spiritual application for them to apply it in their lives. OK. So He's basically giving us this story about a master who has 3 servants who he's going to give them a large amount of money to go out and invest. That's the parable. OK. But what is He referring to when he says the kingdom of God or the Kingdom of heaven? Well, this is one of those things that can sometimes be perplexing and a little bit confusing in Scripture. It literally can have 3 different meanings that are all true meanings and at different times they would apply in different circumstances.

So first and foremost, the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven, because Jesus is sovereign Lord over all, the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven is ultimately God's reign over everything. From the beginning of creation until the end of time, God's kingdom exists because He is Lord of all. OK. But more specifically, there is a spiritual kingdom that God refers to as the kingdom of God or kingdom of heaven. And the spiritual kingdom of God or kingdom of heaven is the kingdom in which every person who has surrendered their life to God in faith and obedience becomes a part of. And anyone who rejects that offer of God's salvation and refuses to submit themselves to His authority, is cast out of that kingdom. In fact, Scripture says that repentance is required to enter the kingdom of God and that you cannot enter the kingdom of God without being born again. So clearly all those who are in Christ are in the kingdom of God. And anyone who rejects that would be outside the kingdom of God. So this context of the kingdom of God directly applies to Matthew 25. And then the third aspect is there is a coming literal physical kingdom where Jesus Christ will reign in a new heaven and a new earth as the Lord of all who exist, His coming kingdom. So that is also looked at as we look at the end of the parable. But primarily, what we're going to look at this morning is the kingdom of God is the spiritual kingdom that we are all called to make a decision about. Whether we will join into that kingdom or whether we will reject that kingdom and choose to go our own way.

So, who are the principle players in the parable? If you look, it says in verse 14, for it will be like a man going on a journey. But if you jump down to verse 19, it says, now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. So we understand this man is a master. What do we know about him? We know he's exceedingly wealthy. We'll explain a talent in a minute. But he's exceedingly wealthy and he has great authority. Well, it's pretty obvious to us as we read Scripture who the master is. But you have to understand, the disciples, Jesus has not sacrificed himself on the cross, He has not been buried, He has not risen from the dead, He has not ascended to heaven, He's talked to them about leaving and returning, but they do not fully understand this concept yet. So He is trying to help them understand that He is the master. He is the man. Now I want you to grasp this this morning because I think if we miss this point, we miss the parable. The master is the center of the parable. He is the main character. If you're like me when I read this, and honestly even this weekend I read through it, my first inclination was, "Who is this about? Well, it's about me. I'm one of these servants and I want to be; well done, good and faithful. I don't want to reject." And immediately I started looking at

this as being about me. What we need to remember that Scripture is primarily a story about Jesus. And this parable is about a master that we need to understand clearly. Because part of the problem we're going to see when we look at this third servant is he missed who the master truly was.

So who is this master? Well, yes, he is a master of great power and extensive wealth. But I want us to think about Jesus just very simply in three concepts this morning. Number 1: He is all powerful and sovereign. Jesus is the creator of all things. He was there in the beginning, John 1:1, in the beginning was the word, the word was with God, the word was God. All things were created through Him and by Him. Nothing was created that was not created. He is the creator of all things. He's completely sovereign and has control over everything. Number 2: He is holy and just. He's perfect. He's righteous. There's no flaw in Him. He always acts in righteousness and justice. But number 3: He is loving and merciful showing grace upon grace to those who fall on the offer of His salvation. This is the master that Jesus is presenting Himself in the parable. And it's critical that we as the reader, and even for the disciples, that they understand who the master is. Because a misinterpretation or understanding of the master will lead the servants to the wrong conclusions and the wrong response. I want to read to you just briefly the lyrics of a song called Only A Holy God. And I think it captures who Christ is to us. Here's what it says:

Who else commands all the hosts of heaven
Who else could make every king bow down
Who else can whisper and darkness trembles
Only a Holy God
What other beauty demands such praises
What other splendor outshines the sun
What other majesty rules with justice

Only a Holy God

What other glory consumes like fire
What other power can raise the dead
What other name remains undefeated
Hallelujah, right?
Only a Holy God

And then the last verse.

Who else could rescue me from my failings
Who else would offer His only Son
Who else invites me to call Him Father
Only a Holy God

That is the master of the story. And so I want us to start this morning understanding who it is we serve. Who else? There are three servants. Let me briefly give you an overview of these three servants, ok. He uses the word servant in the ESV. It also might have an asterisk or a note that says it could also be called bondservant. Your Scripture might say steward or it might say slave.

The word is *doúlos*. Here's the thing we need to make sure we understand. These were not hirelings. These were not employees. These were fully slaves. The term slave or bondservant is the best interpretation. In the Old Testament, a bondservant was someone who at some point was forced into slavery because they owed a debt. And by Jewish law you either paid off your debt or after 6 years you were released from that debt. But at the end of that time, whether you paid it off before that 6 years or at the end of that 6 years, a slave had the option to actually say, "I want to stay committed to my master. I want to serve him for life." Now that sounds very odd to us in our culture because it's very based on freedom and liberty, right? It's all around us all the time. But in biblical times because poverty was so great and literally a vast majority, even more than 50% of people in the culture were slaves or servants. So it was not uncommon for someone to go, "Look, here's the bottom line. My master treats me so well and the conditions are so much better than if I walk out the door tomorrow. Because I've got nothing. I've been an indentured servant for 6 years. If I walk out the door I'm on the street. I would rather stay under the loving care of my master and surrender myself to him completely because of who is and what he's done for me." And they would become a bondservant to that master. That is the term that is being referred to to these three men. That they claim to be bondservants, they've surrendered themselves to the master saying, "We would rather stay and serve you with the rest of our life than walk out and live on our own." So just a couple notes about that to think about. Here's the definition of that; one who gives himself up wholly to another's will. They were fully submitted to the master and they were bonded to him for life. Paul actually called himself a bondservant of Christ. And this fits the New Testament narrative when Paul said in Galatians 6, sorry 1 Corinthians 6, you were bought with a price therefore glorify God with your body. We belong to Christ if we are in the kingdom of God. We are a bondservant. We are connected to him. Not only can we not leave, but why would we ever want to leave when we understand who the Holy God is? And so that is who these bondservants are.

And then finally, what is this called a talent? It says he gave each of them talents. One, five; one, two; and one, one. A talent was a large sum of money. It was equal to 6,000 denarii. A denarii was equal to 1 days wage. So 6 days work week, you do the math, it's equivalent to 20 years of income. So if your boss came and said, "Hey, I'm going to give you 20 years of income, it's yours to make good with for my benefit." That's a lot of money. That's a huge investment. That's a lot of resources. He gave to one, one; one, two; and one, five. Ok. And he sent them out.

Now I just want to share a couple thoughts in regard to what this really means and what this applies to these 5 men. What does the talent apply for us? How does it apply to us? Well, a lot of different arguments. Some people say it's money, we're supposed to invest our money for God. Well, that is true. It's obviously true we're to be good stewards of the money God's given us. But his is a much broader perspective. I think the best way I can describe it is the talent that God gives us is the calling He's placed on our life and the tools He's equipped us with to accomplish it including the talents, gifts, opportunities, and responsibilities that He places in our lives. And it begins with the Gospel itself. The greatest calling in our life is to respond to the Gospel and then to take that Gospel to the world. And so as bondservants of Christ, we have this Gospel that's been given to us. And notice, he gave it to every one of them. He didn't give the same amount to each one so he gave a greater scope, a greater focus. It doesn't mean that it was a different calling, it just means it had a broader perspective. Now, let me give you, here's your little bonus side note for this morning, OK. Because somebody probably needs to hear this.

Stop comparing yourself to other believers. OK. He gave one 5. He gave one 2. He gave one 1. Nowhere in this passage do we see from the one that received 5 or 2 any complaints, any arguing, any jealousy, any bitterness, any resentment. They took what God had given, they trusted what he gave them, and they went and did something with it. There's only two things that happen when we compare to ourselves to others. Either pride or shame. And satan knows which way you lean. Every one of us in this room, we lead to either pride or shame. I'll be honest, like for me, it's pride. I compare myself to others and I can always find out why I'm better than somebody else. I'm just being honest, right? Some of you, and that's a sin issue, right? We have to, but if I get into comparing, I'm going to start looking at myself as better than other people. My wife, I'm going to be in trouble because I just brought my wife into this, ok, she's the exact opposite. She always feels like she's never measuring up, right? Like when she compares herself to someone else, she feels like she's a failure. That's satan. God says, "I've made you who you are, I've given you what you need, stop comparing yourself to other people." Just a couple other thoughts. Everyone is capable of fulfilling the call that the master's given them. OK. He said he gave each according to their ability. So what God gave you, He's equipped you to use and accomplish for His glory. And then lastly, everyone was expected to produce a return, right? We're all expected to produce fruit in our lives. One of my favorite parables is the parable of the four soils. There's these four different soils. Only one of them produced fruit. Only the one that produced fruit was a true believer. There should be evidence of our faith in the fruit in our lives.

So, let's dive into the story. I want us to go backward and then forward quickly. So I want you to jump down to verse 24. We're going to look at the third servant first. We're going to come back to the first and the second servant. So the master comes to settle accounts. In verse 24, the first 2 have already responded and we'll come back to them. But in verse 24 he says this:

²⁴He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying "Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where scattered no seed, ²⁵so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours." ²⁶But his master answered him, "You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? Notice that's a question. ²⁷Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. ²⁸So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. ²⁹For to everyone who has more will be given, he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. ³⁰And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Number one this morning, we have a calling, right? God's calling on our life is to serve Him and obey Him. But here's the second part I want us to grasp this morning. Is a warning that God gives to every one of us that He places this call to. Notice here, he has called this servant to do something, to respond to the Gospel that He offers him. Notice that the servant has been living alongside the other bondservants. He's been in touch with the master. And yet somehow he missed the message. If we go back to the beginning of the parable, verse 18,

But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money.

Somewhere immediately there's a disconnect, right? He doesn't understand this loving, powerful, awesome, merciful, master who's also just and holy and expects us to respond with our lives in obedience to Him. So whether it was out of fear or out of pride, it's not absolutely clear whether he's being deceptive or honest in this, but what we see is he missed the mark. Watch this. He made no effort at all to please the master. When we understand what the master has done for us, what Christ has done on the Christ for us, our natural response should be, "I want to serve Him with my life." He took that talent, he immediately walked away and he just buried it. And then for whatever period of time the master was gone, he did absolutely nothing. He just walked away. Here's my analysis and thought on that. There was no effort because there was no desire to please the master. There was no desire to please the master because there was no relationship with the master to begin with and there was no relationship with the master because he missed understanding who the master truly was. And so when the master returns, he comes back and goes, "Hey, I didn't lose it, I didn't break it, I didn't steal it, it's all here, here's exactly what you gave me, I give it back to you." Do you see what he just did? He literally gave back the gift that the master gave him. Instead of taking it and allowing it to impact his life and living it out and touching other people, he literally said, "I don't know what to do with this, I'm afraid or I'm prideful, so here take it back." And he gave back the one thing that God had given him that would have allowed him to serve and obey and connect to the master. And I want you to grasp this. The master did not judge the third servant because of his actions. He judged him because of his heart. If you notice, immediately he says, his master answered him, "You wicked and slothful servant." Wicked is evil, right? We know as Christians there's times when we're going to fail, fall short, God's going to discipline us, but God does not call a believer wicked. He does not call a believer evil. That was the nature of his heart. And that word slothful, it does mean lazy but it also means reluctant. There was a resistant to even responding to what the master was asking. And I wonder as Jesus spoke this parable if even at this moment he was already beginning to think about as Judas sat there and listened. Because in the very next chapter we read about Judas going out to meet and bargain in how he could betray Jesus. And if Jesus' heart, even as He shared this parable, was broken over the knowledge that one of those sitting with Him was this man, who He was offering life through Him and He knew was going to walk away. And oftentimes we have many people sitting in pews every Sunday that they hear the message, they fit outwardly but man looks on the outward appearance and God looks on the heart. And He knew the heart of the servant. He knew that he was wicked. He knew that he was resistant. He knew that he was reluctant. And the result was he was not allowed to enter into the kingdom of God. And there's no way, there's no analogy that Jesus could give other than actually what he gives to describe the loss that this man has. Look at the end of the chapter. 28 - Take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. Verse 30, cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. He almost just walks out of the parable and goes, "Hey, I'm not talking about a parable anymore. OK. I'm talking about the eternal punishment that comes for those who resist a loving God." Because there's no comparison, earthly, to what he just said. Outer darkness and weeping and gnashing of teeth. That is complete separation from the God of the universe. And that is the result of one who rejects the loving offer of the Gospel by a master who is holy and just.

So that is the warning for us. There's a calling for us; there's a warning for us. But I want to finish this morning and look at the promise that God gives going back to verse 20. And this is what led me to this passage and why I'd like to finish with it this morning.

²⁰He who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, “Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made my five talents more.

And then we’re going to 22.

²²And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, “Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more.”

And then 21 and 23 are identical responses to these two bondservants.

²¹His master said to him (three things), “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.”

I want you to notice the difference in the response of the third servant and the first two bondservants. Reluctance, hesitancy, selfishness, apathy, immediate response. It says, when they received the talents immediately they went out. They served, they worked. Their greatest desire was to bring joy and pleasure to the master. They were not afraid of failure because they knew they could not fail. And if they did fail, the master would be merciful. Why could they not fail? Because everything they had came from the master. All their ability was his. And he had provided them the resources to accomplish what he wanted. So they went out in full confidence knowing the master supported everything that he had called them to do. This is part of the promise that God has given us as believers this morning. As we face a new year, as we look at the trials of 2021, we can look forward and say, “Whatever God has before me He has equipped me for, He has prepared me for, He will see me through, and if I stumble, He will lift me up and His mercy will be new in the morning.”

So let’s look at his response. Three things. He says, “Well done good and faithful servants.” That term well done means, good job. I mean, every one of us loves to receive accolades. We love to be commended. But here’s what I want us to grasp. I truly believe that the bondservant’s response to this commendation was not, “Look at me, look at me, look at me.” But, “I am so excited that the master is pleased.” It wasn’t about, let me elevate myself. It was, wow, I’ve done what my master desired. Well done good and faithful servant. Now how many of you remember that moment your child first rode their bike, right, or how about this one, the first great athletic accomplishment, ok. Driver’s license on the third try, seventh try, still working on the try, whatever that looks like, right. We can go to marriage, if you don’t remember, I can tell you where your memories are. Just go to Facebook. Because moms, they’re there, ok. Some of you, there’s too many of them. But look, we celebrate our children’s successes. But I would bet that if we’re honest, though as great as those things are, there are things that we celebrate even more. And that’s when our child, try this one, maybe you’re just going, “Well, this has never happened to me.” Maybe it’s still coming. One morning you get up and your child’s supposed to take out the trash every Tuesday morning and they never do it. Take out the trash. Do I have to? I don’t want to take it. And you’re dragging them kicking and screaming to do it. And one morning you walk outside and the trash can’s on the curb. You faint. Your husband comes and picks you up. You come inside. You realize my child actually, on their own, responded in obedience, right? Or even better, their faced with a choice; right/wrong, good/bad, holiness/impurity, and they choose rightly on their own. And you say, “Praise God. What a blessing. How excited I

am to see them make the right choice.” Those things are greater than these earthly rewards. This is the response God has to us. He says, “When you respond in obedience, when you respond rightly, when you respond in a holy response to Me, I am excited for My children.” And He celebrates our success, our spiritual maturing.

But then he says good and faithful servant. Here’s something we have to remember. OK. This is not about works and this is not a works based salvation message. Ephesians 2:8 – 9 says:

⁸It is by grace you are saved through faith. Not of yourself, ⁹not of works, lest any man should boast. ¹⁰For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works,

So we don’t do works to become saved, we don’t do works to get into the kingdom, we respond to what we receive from the kingdom by doing good works. So when Jesus says, good and faithful servant, what He’s simply saying is this. There’s none righteous, no not one, you didn’t do this on your own, ok. Every good and perfect gift comes from above, James 1:17. But you are living out the goodness that God has placed in you. That’s what we’re doing. And faithfulness is based on the fact that we have faith in a God. We can live faithfully because we trust God completely, right? So when he says good and faithful, what he says is, “I have servants who trust me completely and are allowing me through the Holy Spirit, Galatians 5:16, walk in the Spirit, you will not fulfill the lusts of the flesh, who are living out through the Spirit what I have given them as the talents, the calling, the giftedness, to serve me completely.” And so he says, well done good and faithful servant. I think of as we talked about Judas and the third, I think about Peter here. Peter wasn’t perfect, right? Peter failed miserably. But all of Peter’s failures with the exception of possibly his denial the night before the crucifixion, were always over, trying to over achieve, right? He was always trying to do more and God had to completely bring in and go, “Peter, just do what I want.” But I believe that God was well pleased with Peter as we think about what Peter did for the kingdom. Because even through adversity, Peter continued to come back. Why? Because Peter loved Jesus. He deeply loved Jesus. And we know that his denial was crushing to him because he realized he had disappointed the master that he loved so greatly. And so God comes back, Jesus comes back to him after His resurrection and restores that relationship and sends him out. And Peter, I can imagine what that would look like when he stood before Christ in heaven and He said, “Well done good and faithful servant.”

Then he says secondly, you have been faithful over a few things, I’ll make you ruler over many. Here’s the bottom line, ok. When we serve God, He opens more doors for us to serve Him more greatly. He creates more opportunities. What do you find fulfilment in? Here’s the problem for many of us. We’re seeking fulfilment after fulfilment after fulfilment and it’s short lived. Where we find true fulfilment is in Christ. And I don’t know if you’ve ever had the opportunity to lead someone to Christ, I don’t know if you’ve had the opportunity to serve someone or you’ve seen their life changed where they pursued the Lord or they’ve been served, healed, touched. But when you do that, the fulfilment that comes from God working through us is greater than anything the world has to offer. And so when we’re faithful in the small things God’s called us to do, He’s going to create so much more opportunity which is going to create an opportunity for us to experience more fulfilment in Him which is only going to draw us closer into a relationship with Him.

And then thirdly, and really as I sought this out this week, this is where I felt for a lot of people we need to land. He says this;

[Enter into the joy of the master.](#)

Enter into the joy of the master. So great job, you did it. I want you to continue to serve me because I have fulfillment that you can't imagine and here is the ultimate promise. And this has an eternal promise and a here and now promise. The eternal is there's a time where we're going to stand in the presence and joy of the Lord physically for eternity. But right now that joy is available to us. And I want you to think about the concept of entering into something. Number one, if you enter into something you have to step out of something else, right? A lot of us, the problem we're not experiencing joy is because we're living in misery. I don't know about you, but when I walked in from the outside, right, I entered into warmth and I stepped out of freezing cold, right? Some of us need to enter into the joy of the Lord. We're out there sitting in the cold, freezing, wet, miserable, depressed because God is saying, "My joy is here. Enter in." Also, think about this. Entering into something, that term enter in, ok, we're going in something. In fact, it even applies, here's the definition. It says this. A place in which an object can be hidden, secure. Do you feel like you need a place to hide sometimes? Do you need a place where you can have security and comfort? The master says, when you fulfil your calling, I will create a place for you of security, of shelter, and protection when the storms around you rage. And what is it we're entering into? Joy. Now I don't know about you, many of you know I have a special needs son. His name's Cody, he's 26. Cody loves presents. Now let me explain what I mean by Cody loves presents. Cody loves to open presents. And it doesn't matter if there's one, 10, or 6,000. He wants them all. And if it's not your present, if it's not his present, it's still his present, right. If it's somebody else's birthday, we know, better bring Cody a present because we ain't getting through the day if he doesn't have something to open. And he will open and open and open and open and every one is the most exciting thing. 90% of the time it doesn't matter what's in the box, right. It's just the opening. Here's the problem though. When the last present is done, he's never satisfied. Presents. I want more presents. Where are the presents? I'm out of presents. He constantly needs something else to create pleasure or happiness. That is not the definition of the joy that God offers. It's an eternal joy. It's a self-sustaining joy. It's always available. It never fades, it never weakens, and if we will stay in it it will always provide for us that strength in the storm. We try to find happiness in all the things the world offers and we come up empty. And God's saying, "Enter into the joy of the Master." When I was in college, we had this accountability sheet. It asked all these questions; have you done this, have you read the Bible, did you go to church, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And the last two questions were always the ones I hated. The last question was, have you lied about anything on the page. I'm like, "Well, that's just no fair." I mean if this is accountability, I'm not supposed to be accountable if I'm lying am I? So I just didn't like that question. But the second to the last one just, it just jabbed me in the side every time and it was simply this; have you allowed anything to rob you of your joy. Man, that's hurt. That's hard. Because some of you today driving home, getting on the bypass, someone's going to cut you off, and your joy is gone, right. Some of you before you got to church this morning your joy was gone, right. And you're going, how did you know? We've all been there. It's so easy for us to be robbed of the joy that God has to offer. And yet if we enter into it, it is this incredible blessing that God has for us.

And so very simply this morning as we wrap up, I just want to challenge you with three thoughts. Simply this. Number one, Christ is going to return. He does call us to a response to the calling He's placed in our lives. And the warning for us is very, very clear. We need to make sure we are not like the third servant. Someone who's living among the bondservants, someone who knows the master but has literally taken the gift and said, "I'm just going to bury it and leave it here and ignore it and hopefully at the end God will let me in." Because the passage is clear, that's not the answer. And if you this morning God has stirred your heart to say, I need to experience the full kingdom of God by surrendering my life to Him, I want to encourage you to do that. Right where you're at. Right here in the service, online in your living room, wherever you're at. If God is calling you to surrender your life to Him, do that. Here's number two: For me, my challenge to myself for 2022 is to take verse 21 or 23 if you like, and make this the verse for the year. Especially with the goal of living a life that says, well done good and faithful servant. That day by day I can look back and say, God I want to be a day today where you say, "Well done good and faithful servant." Where I walk daily pursuing You. Let me just give you one simple say to do that. John 15, Jesus said, I'm the vine, you're the branches. And then He said just very simply, He said, abide in Me and I in you and you'll bear much fruit. If we abide in Christ, we will accomplish His calling in our lives and we will be able to say, "I'm confident that God is pleased with my life." And then here's number 3. I want you to go back to that number that you wrote in your paper, wrote in your head. How did you rate 2021? I'm sure for a lot of you, you might of put, eh 6, 7. Maybe it was a 5. There's somebody in this room, it was a 3, a 2. Maybe 2021 was the worst year of your life. I could be honest, when I first asked this question, I asked my wife, I asked my daughter, one person in my family gave a 10 and you're just like, come one, a 10? Really? You're that person. I won't say who it is. But praise God, right? It was a great year. Hallelujah. But when I first thought about it, it was a struggle for me to really think through how was 2021. It's been a rough year. Lot of difficulties. But as I really begin to process all the blessings that God has given in my life, I realize that when we enter into His joy, we can live at a 10. In the midst of the storm in the heartbreak of the difficulties and the failures and the discouragements and the depressions, God will allow us to enter into His joy and rise above the circumstances. And so I just want to say to you this morning, if 2021 was just a struggle of a year for you, enter into His joy this morning. Maybe that needs, just come and pray and ask God to restore your hope and your joy. Maybe you need to pull someone aside and say, "Will you just join me in praying for me because I've struggled." Maybe it means diving into a situation of accountability where you can get the help you need. But if it has been a hard year, will you commit to entering into the joy that God offers us in living in that? Satan wants nothing more to make you discouraged and unproductive. God wants nothing more than for you to live in His joy and experience His love.

Let's pray.

Father God, we come to the end of a year. For some it's been difficult, for some it's been good. But God I know that there are those in this room that are struggling. And I pray this morning that as they move forward to this new year, You might through Your Spirit just touch their hearts and bring a word of encouragement to them. God, for the majority of us who are struggling to pursue You more, God help us to abide in You. To set aside distractions, to re-prioritize our lives in a way that would allow You to have the primary focus. And God for anyone in this room or online that does not know You as their Lord and Savior, God, would You help them to

heed the warning to avoid the punishment that comes from those who reject a loving but holy God. Pray all this in Jesus name. Amen.